

No. 14. Repentance enforced.

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*Acts 26th, 20th.**—Repent and turn to God.*

That the means of Salvation God has kindly put into our hands, should become the instruments of ruin; that the weapons by which we are to withstand the enemies of our souls should be turned against ourselves, and plunged with deadly force into our own bosoms—is a truth sanctioned by observation, and confirmed by experience. We believe Religion, and the recompence of it, to be certain; & if we die in our sins, that we shall utterly perish—but we suppress the bitterness of the reflection, by designing to repent “before we go hence:” so that the thoughts of repentance, instead of affrighting us from, encourage us in, our sins: instead of forsaking them in heart and life, we continue in them without apprehension, and become hardened by habit: we suffer the imaginary privilege of a future repentance to destroy the present necessity of a good life, and weaken the force of all religion.

Impenitence, alas! suggests so many treacherous arguments for continuing in sin, that, though it is easy to obviate them, they generally take such firm hold of the mind as to render it deaf to the voice of reason, and impregnable against the force of Revelation. The grand enemy of our souls baits his deceitful hooks with the lure of pleasure, and mingles his deadly potions with the oblivion of remorse. We may indulge ourselves in sin, he insinuates, with security; we may repent hereafter, & then will satisfaction be made to God's justice: when the appetite is satiated with gratification, and the passions are weakened by excess, self-denial will have lost its mortifications, and repentance be deprived of its severity.

Such is the snare in which the thoughtless and the profligate are entangled! The time of repentance, God knows, seldom comes; it is scarce thought of till it is too late;—till sickness seizes, or death arrests us. Repentance consists in a change of disposition and in amendment of life; and what change can be wrought

when we are enfeebled with a lingering disorder, or distracted with racking pain? what amendment can take place when the term of life is expiring, and the season of death is at hand?

That a man may repent on a death-bed is, perhaps, true in itself, but, unquestionably, dangerous in its consequences. The Scriptures assure us for our comfort, that, "when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful & right, he shall save his soul alive." And is this to encourage us to delay our repentance? Because some were called at the eleventh hour, shall we presumptuously extend that instance to ourselves? God no sooner called, but they answered, saying with Samuel, "speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." How often, on the contrary, has He called us by the gracious whispers of his Spirit—how often has He commanded us, by the threatnings of his Justice, "to repent and turn to Him?" He designed the privilege of repentance

(4)

to be the means of bringing us to Himself; & shall we perversely frustrate his intention by making it the means of alienating us the more from Him?

But the danger of delaying our Repentance will appear still greater by considering that Death may interpose betwixt us and the season we appoint for it. That we are subject to his empire we know, and we cannot but know, from our own constitutions and the frequent instances of mortality. But the time when he will exercise his power, God has not thought fit to discover to us, that we might not have the shadow of pretence to live in the commission of sin. We see people around us called hence without the least degree of warning, who have not so much time allowed as once to implore God's mercy for the forgiveness of their offences. From the number of accidents to which we are liable, and the variety of distempers to which we are subject, every day of our lives ought to be an act of repentance—or, in the language of scripture, "we should grow in grace, and in the knowledge of

"our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Many people intend to indulge themselves in sin, only for a certain season, and then they will repent. But, however short may be the time, we know not that we shall live till we have committed the intended sin, or, however, till we have made our peace with God. But, supposing that the time we have fixed for our amendment should arrive, do we suppose that sin will have lost its charms, or that we shall have stronger inclinations to goodness than we have at present? The longer any one continues in sin, the more hardened he will naturally become; and the less intercourse he has in acts of piety & devotion with his Creator & Redeemer, the less sensible he will be of religious impressions; till, at last, he arrives at that state of impenitence as to live "without God in the world"—allied to Him, neither by the interests of hope nor the alarms of fear. Let every man, who has persuaded himself he means to repent, consider, that, if he finds any difficulty now in forsaking his sins, the longer he continues to com-

(6)

mit them, the greater in proportion will be the difficulty of forsaking them at last; and should the Almighty deny him the power of his Grace, and the readiness of his mercy, he goes down to the grave, overwhelmed with iniquity, and distracted with apprehension. Unless then you can shew a promise from God that He will both allow you time, & likewise afford his Grace to late repentance—never trust to so deceitful an intention. God himself declares, that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man." Be afraid, lest, by resisting the offers of God's mercy, your impenitence shut up the bowels of his compassion. Even, if you should think of repenting at last, is it likely, after you have served the Devil and your own lusts, as long as you dared, that God should hear, when you are disposed, for the first time, to call seriously upon Him? Justly, according to the Prophet, "may He number such to the sword, and bow them down to the slaughter; because when He called they did not answer, when He spake, they did not hear,

"but did evil before his eyes, & did chuse that wheres
"in He delighted not."

But that a late repentance is most dangerous, & not to be depended on, will more fully appear by considering in what repentance consists. If when we lie upon a death-bed to be exceedingly sorry we had led so profligate a life, & had so often set God Almighty at defiance—to sigh, and lament, and despair—to join in prayers with the minister, and to receive, with trembling hands and a misgiving heart, the blessed Sacrament—if this were repentance, few would die impenitent. But be not deceived; with such ridiculous offerings God only is mocked. Repentance consists in a renewal of the heart and mind, "in ceasing to do evil, in learning to do well." On a death-bed, indeed, a man may perform the first part of repentance, he may cease to do evil, when he has no longer the power; but how should he learn to do well, when he is ceasing to exist? Whether such an imperfect repentance be available, is known only to God: but,

(8)

if you think your souls worth saving, let me, for God's sake, for the sake of your souls, let me prevail with you not to depend upon it.

I will presume a little longer on your patience, whilst I earnestly exhort you to repent and turn to God.

Let me then earnestly request all who are here present, to enter seriously into your own consciences & enquire, with impartiality, whether "you have made your peace with God?" whether you are in that state in which you would chuse to appear before Him?

If you are not, let me persuade you to begin this day to forsake "the sins which so easily beset you." If you delay, you know not but you may add to the unhappy number of those who have been cut off in the midst of their sins—who have been called to the great Tribunal the very moment they have been perversely offending their Redeemer & their Judge. And can any consideration be so alarming as the committing a sin one moment in this world, and being punished for it the

very next, it may be, in another? As our lives are
 held, all, by the same tenure, we are none of us certain
 but it may be our unhappy case. How many have
 died in a state of intoxication! How many with
 oaths & imprecations in their mouths! Tremble, lest
 your sins should meet with a like punishment! But
 you hope, you say, to live to repent. What is such a
 thought but an insult of the blackest dye you can offer to
 the Majesty of Heaven? You hope to live to repent!
 What! you will continue in sin, either till you can
 continue no longer, or till you are afraid of your
 deserved punishment being inflicted; and then, wrest-
 ing from the Almighty his attribute of Justice, you
 would make a bargain with Him: by a few prayers,
 and sighs, and tears, you would deprive the Devil,
 whom you have been serving all your life long, of his
 reasonable expectations. Consider, Christians, unless
 you are suddenly cut off, you are to lie on a death-bed;
 and, if you have lived in any known sin, if your
 heart be alienated from God, words cannot express the

miserery of your situation: one moment, you persuade yourselves your state is not quite desperate, and "you hope," as the Apostle strongly expresses it, "even against hope:" the next, your sins are set in array before you, the means and opportunities, the calls and invitations to repentance which you have either perversely despised or obdurately resisted.

Could I set before your eyes the horrors of a death-bed repentance—could I present to you the melancholy prospect the sinner perceives of eternity—could I describe his forced prayers, his irresolute wishes, his distracted mind—could I shew you, whilst he is celebrating the blessed Sacrament—he, who seldom thought of "the agony and bloody sweat of his Redeemer," before the king of terrors stared him in the face—how his soul is filled with all the horrors of conscious guilt, of anticipated punishment, of black despair—no one would suffer such a state to be his own—you would all, from this day, "repent and turn to God." In the discharge of our ministerial duty, we are some-

times, alas! witnesses to such a distressing situation; and when the unhappy being enquires, with anxious solicitude, whether the Gospel warrants him to hope his sorrow will be accepted for repentance—then, how arduous is our situation? to flatter is to betray: to deliver the truths of the Gospel is to create a Hell in his bosom, and to consign him to the torments of the Damned, even whilst he is lingering on the brink of eternity.—Lest you should be deprived, my Brethren, of the benefits of a true repentance, and should have no other hopes of salvation, than in a few fruitless wishes and ineffectual prayers in your last moments, let me conjure you by the mercy & the justice of God, by your desire of happiness both here and hereafter, let me prevail with you instantly to “repent and turn to God;” then, when the deadly dart is pointed at your bosom—when the pulse of life beats slow—when every object of delight is vanished—when “your ears are dull of hearing” and your eyes can scarce discern your sorrowing friends—when you are taking the last embrace

of those you esteem the 'dearest, and bidding them a long, long farenel, you may be able to address them in these comfortable words—"weep not for me, but for yourselves—mine eyes have seen thy salvation—" come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

That such may be our departure, let us humbly offer up our petitions to the Almighty Being, "in whose hand are the issues of life and death."

'Almighty God, the fountain of wisdom, the source of mercy, we, thy unworthy creatures, prostrate ourselves before thy throne, with the utmost reverence, with the profoundest veneration, supplicating thy Grace in the renewal of our hearts, and the conversion of our souls! Trembling with apprehension, lest we should be called in a state of unrepented sin into that presence which no mortal eye can behold and live, we do, from this moment, make an utter renunciation of every vice; from this moment we dedicate our lives to thy service. Impress, we implore Thee, by the operations of thy Holy Spirit, the obligations we lie

' ourselves under of " walking henceforth in newness
 ' of life." Present, continually, to our minds that
 ' awful period when the soul shall leave this earthly
 ' tenement, and shall be called to " give account of all
 ' the deeds done in the body." May we live, as we
 ' shall wish we had always lived, when we are about
 ' to die! And when Thou art pleased to take us
 ' hence, blot out our sins, pardon our transgressions,
 ' and receive us, we beseech Thee, through the merits
 ' of Jesus Christ, into the arms of thy mercy!

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

...under of "nothing but death in death"
of life. I feel, however, to be much more
...shall be called to "give account of all"
the death done in the body. "May we then, as we
shall wish to be always free, when we are dead
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and receive us, we depend on, through the merits
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